



Hilaire du Berrier, in Djibouti, "The Territory of the Afars and Issas," wears the Arab headdress and Agal he acquired for a job with the Imam of Yeman in 1936.

The Life and Times of Hilaire du Berrier

GENTLEMAN OF FORTUNE

by Jim Graves

Photos Courtesy of du Berrier Family Collection

ON 6 April 1943, Ichiyi Sato of the Kempetai, Japan's secret police, noted a new name on the list of prisoners being held for interrogation in the formerly British Union Jack Club building in Shanghai.

The man's name was Hilaire du Berrier. While he had a French name, he had been born in America and held an American passport. Japan was at war with the United States and the xenophobic Japanese assumed all Americans in China were spies.

Count Vladimir Tatistcheff, one of the numerous White Russian exiles who made a living in Shanghai as Kempetai informers, had cast suspicion upon du Berrier by telling half-true tales of the American's past.

Du Berrier had fought for Haile Selassie against Mussolini's Black Shirts in 1936, Count Tatistcheff declared. He had traveled in Djibouti, Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Romania. He had fought for the Republicans in Spain. He had been in Vietnam in 1937, in Hong Kong in 1938 with the notorious English soldier of fortune, One-Armed Sutton, and made a mysterious trip to Borneo in 1939. He spoke French, Ethiopian, Arabic and Chinese as well as he spoke English, and he understood Spanish and Greek. He must be a senior American intelligence agent.

For Sato and the Kempetai it was more than enough. Du Berrier would go upstairs to the interrogation room.

Sato's suspects, seven of them, were held in a walled-up cigarette stand on the first floor of the British servicemen's club. When the Kempetai wanted to talk things over, a guard would bellow out an unintelligible name. While the prisoners consulted on whose turn it was to go upstairs, the impatient Kempetai guards waited.

If too much time passed before a prisoner emerged from the crawlway that had been created by nailing shut the top half of a dutch door, he would be kicked savagely by the waiting guards.

Upstairs it was more brutal. Sato's Kempetai toughs were not above using hands and fists on prisoners whose answers did not please them — regardless of whether the answers were true or not — but the standard routines consisted of periodic beatings with a metal-tipped stick, the rack and a variation of the water torture. The Japs preferred to pour water into a funnel that deposited the water onto a soaked towel covering the prisoner's mouth and nostrils. The sensation of drowning was quite realistic.

After one particularly cruel session, du Berrier was tossed back into his cell. Nearly at the end of his resistance, he lay on the floor crying.

John Cook, an old Englishman and head of an English spy ring in Shanghai, had been upstairs the previous day. One



Du Berrier at age 4 in Flasher, N.D. Behind him is his dog "Count," whom he wouldn't sell to Albert, his dog-stew-loving Indian friend.

of the Kempetai had jumped a little too hard and long on Cook and had busted up a few things inside the Englishman.

Holding one arm around his stomach, Cook crawled over to du Berrier and said, "Hey, lad, do you happen to know what day it is?"

Du Berrier, startled out of his despondency, replied, "As near as I can tell, John, it's the 18th of April."

Cook, wincing at the pain it caused, started to laugh and said, "You know, lad, 20 years ago today I was in jail in Russia for the same thing."

Du Berrier burst out laughing. The joke was that men who led lives of adventure had to expect the occasional bit of excitement to be accompanied by danger and terror.

"With a sketchy outline of my past, it was easy for the Japs to make me into a more dangerous catch than Lawrence of Arabia," recalled du Berrier. "Between every trip upstairs I looked back through my life and asked myself how I ended up in a Japanese prison in Shanghai. There was no answer, save that there was a wide world full of danger and adventure and I could not avoid its beckoning."

Hilaire du Berrier began his life of wandering in 1906 as Harold Berry in Flasher, N.D. He was the first white child born in the town founded by his father, who had changed du Berrier into Berry, married a second-generation German girl and moved to the edge of Sioux country to build his fortune.

Young Harold — quickly shortened to Hal against his mother's wishes — grew

up in an atmosphere of sturdy, puritanical townsmen, rough unwashed cowboys and Indians.

Young Hal disliked most cowboys only a little less than he disliked the townsmen. His real friends were the Indians, veterans of Sitting Bull's war parties that had wiped out Custer's 7th Cavalry at Little Big Horn — such as Lame Walking Cow and Albert Wind-Did-Blow. Hal's father was smart enough to listen to the Indians' stories, and they, in turn, treated the Berry family with respect. Lame Walking Cow had presented Berry with a beaded knife sheath which once held the knife Sitting Bull had used to cut out Custer's heart.

The first sign of spring in Flasher was the arrival of Albert Wind-Did-Blow rumbling into town from the reservation in his lumber wagon, accompanied by his latest squaw or squaws. Albert was reasonably well taken care of — the government paid him \$30 a month to stay on the reservation and off the path that had led to Little Big Horn. But Albert was a gregarious type who liked to wander, and each spring he pestered the Indian agent to let him leave the reservation to visit his white friends in Flasher.

Soon after pitching his teepee in a meadow near town, Albert would appear at the Berry house. Even after Hal's father died in 1912, Albert was welcome to dine at the Berrys'.

Mrs. Berry thought Albert called out of respect for her husband, but the truth was that he liked dogs — in soup, stew or simply roasted. His visits were a signal to young Hal, who soon thereafter would head for Albert's teepee, leading a dog. Hunting dogs, which belonged to the men of the town (who understood what was going on), were not included, but strays were fair game. For each dog he rustled, Albert paid Hal 25 cents, regardless of size, shape, color or breed.

Hal's need for quarters increased

when he made two discoveries at age 12: 1) Esther, the 18-year-old maid recently hired by Mrs. Berry, loved chocolate Mounds® and 2) Esther was willing to assist Hal's growing-up process — provided he could supply the chocolate.

It was perfect that spring and summer of 1918 as Hal led dog after dog to Albert's teepee, received his money and dashed for the confectionary. Albert and his squaws were well-fed, Hal had money and Esther had her chocolate Mounds®. The few stray dogs left on Flasher's streets were nervous.

As summer turned to autumn, Hal continued in ignorant bliss. Even though his source of money had returned to the reservation, Esther had begun to enjoy the relationship and was willing to continue sans Mounds®. At some point, however, Mrs. Berry had become suspicious. One winter afternoon she returned early and surprised Hal and Esther in bed together. Hal cried as Esther was sent packing that night in the middle of a snowstorm.

Hal was sent off to the Pillsbury Academy, a boys' military school in Owatonna, Minn., for a little discipline. Four years later, just one month before he was due to graduate, Hal was expelled by the headmaster, Dr. Milo B. Price. Price's parting comment was, "Berry, you are the most worthless student I have expelled from this school since I expelled Harry Williams 15 years ago." A long time later, Hal Berry learned that Harry Williams had written "It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary." It's doubtful that accomplishment would have changed Price's opinion of Williams even had he known.

To escape North Dakota, Hal talked his mother into sending him to art school in Chicago. It was here that he had the opportunity through Ed Heath's Flying School to take up flying, an obsession of his since early childhood. This obsession was the first step on the path that led him to the upstairs interrogation room in Shanghai.

Heath had a clipped-wing biplane with a World War I surplus OX-5 motor in which he allowed Walt Meyer, Harold Van Tefel and Hal Berry to barnstorm. Passengers paid \$5 a ride, but the real money came from stunts. Berry was paid \$20 for free-fall parachuting into fairgrounds; thrilling in those days, since the parachutist went up in the back seat of the plane, crawled out over the wing's trailing edge, lowered himself into a swing attached to a large sock that contained the parachute and then waited until the pilot picked up sufficient speed, at which time he untied a knot that cut him, and hopefully the parachute, away.

Van Tefel and Berry made even more money doing loops. The Jonsunite High Test Gasoline and Motor Oil Company paid the two daredevils \$50 for every loop they made with Berry sitting



ABOVE: Du Berrier and an unknown fan at a fairground in Illinois or Wisconsin during his barnstorming days, 1928-1931. **BELOW:** Rope leader in du Berrier's hands was used in a stunt. Du Berrier would switch planes in midair, climbing the rope ladder, trailed from the bottom wing of the lead plane, after climbing out on the top wing of the chase plane.



on the top wing of the biplane. Berry had a rope attached from his waist to the wing, but actually he didn't need it since he stayed in contact with the wing during the loop by hooking his foot around a wing strut wire on the way up and over, and centrifugal force held him on the wing coming down. Somewhat more tricky was the stunt in which Berry would switch planes in midair, climbing from the top wing of the bottom chase plane via a rope ladder that trailed from the bottom wing of the top lead plane.

By 1931 Berry tired of the barnstorming circuit, so, through his mother, he arranged to accompany his uncle, the United States Commissioner of the French Colonial Exposition, to Paris.

Paris in the early '30s was the place to be during what Berry — now calling himself Hilaire du Berrier since that was more useful in France — called Europe's Indian Summer.

The battles of the Somme and Verdun were far enough in the past that the survivors' tales of World War I sounded wonderful and exciting, not deadly. World War II was still in the murky future and few noticed the events of the early '30s that signaled the coming cataclysm.

The city was filled with haughty French veterans who had won World War I and stopped the Reds in Poland (the French version), American and other foreign adventurers who had helped them in the Lafayette Escadrille or the French Foreign Legion, and White Russians who had fled the revolution of 1918 and spent their time concocting cafe-plots — as fascinating as they were futile — to retrieve Russia from the Bolsheviks.

Paris was an enchanting city for prospectors of stories like du Berrier, who was just another American writer like Ernest Hemingway or Henry Miller feeding on the tales and energy of the city. "A 'writer' was defined loosely in those days," said du Berrier later. "One didn't have to be published, one only had to try."

The city was full of American artists and "artists," writers and "writers," and adventurers and "adventurers." Equipped with top hat, gloves, cane and monocle, and financed with \$50 a month from his mother — his allowance would last only three months, but he intended to join the Foreign Legion when he was cut off — du Berrier plunged into Parisian life.

Du Berrier, a confirmed Francophile and monarchist since the age of nine, when he was given a book on Napoleon's cavalry, loved it.

"Every new day in the Paris of that period was like a free lottery ticket because it might bring anything and was certain to bring something," he said.

"In the Tuileries Gardens, not far from the Orangerie, where one could see

A Miss of the Motor WOULD MEAN DISASTER



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Time-torn flyer from the Jonsunite company used to promote barnstorming act of Harold Van Teffel and Hal du Berrier. While du Berrier perched on the top wing, Van Teffel would fly a loop in the Monarch biplane.

Degas' painting of his father listening to a violin, there was a statue of Puss in Boots in a swashbuckling pose with his catch of mice hanging from his belt. Further down, among the trees there were benches, and one of the advantages of being a foreigner in a strange land is that the foreigner can talk to anybody without benefit of introduction. None of the rules apply."

With the rules suspended, du Berrier's collection of friends and acquaintances found on the Tuileries benches and in cafes all over Paris grew to include royalty-in-exile, such as Russia's Grand Duke Dimitri and Prince Felix Youssouppoff and Spain's Don Jaime de Bourbon, as well as some fake royalty, like the American Prince Michael Romanoff, a pretender to the Russian throne.

Paris also drew more than its share of powerful women or women who had been close to power. Du Berrier, who always maintained close friendships with the ladies, became acquainted with Marie Barnes, former mistress of Baron de Mumm; Louise Bryant, former mistress of John Reed; Mahjidi Hanoum, a Turkish dancer; and Kiki, an American author and one of the leading characters in Paris. In a foreword to one of her books, Hemingway declared that Kiki had never had a bedroom of her own. She loved it.

Although the people du Berrier had met in the cafes and parks were intriguing, it was a case of paratyphoid (caught from eating in cheap restaurants) and confinement in the American Hospital that changed his life and put him on the road to China.

"Entering the American Hospital was like passing the obstacle to a new rule of Arabic grammar, which is called *el bab*, the gate, because it opens the way to a

richer and more spacious hall," said du Berrier.

While there were notables among the staff, including brain surgeon Dr. Thierry de Martel, and among the patients, like artist Earl Kirkham, it was the destitute soldiers and writers about soldiers who fascinated du Berrier.

Across du Berrier's room was an American black known only as Freddie. "He was the sort of person one pictured in some Southern American town, sleeping under a tree when not engaged in just enough menial labor to keep him alive," said du Berrier.

But Freddie left the South, worked his way across the ocean, entered France with neither passport nor birth certificate and joined the Foreign Legion during WWI, long before America entered the war.

"Thus Freddie found himself in 1931 and 1932 doubled up with rheumatism and unable to go home or enter the American Hospital as a charity patient because he hadn't a paper in the world to prove he was American, though two minutes of conversation proved that he couldn't be anything else. An anonymous American read of Freddie's plight in the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune* and got him into the hospital.

"When Kirkham tired of listening to stories of soldiers, he would say, 'Freddie, sing us a song.' Doubled up with pain, the former legionnaire would turn his face toward the ceiling and sing in a doleful voice:

"'Oh, say good-bye to mother. She knows there is no other. Oh, kiss those dear sweet lips of hers and tell her I'm not coming home.'

"Freddie put his heart and soul into the only song he knew. I have often wondered who buried him and where, though I should not, for the Legion never forgets its own."

Foremost among American legionnaires was Charles M. Sweeny (see "Sweeny of the Legion," SOf, May '82), who lived with his French wife at 21 Rue Ste-Genevieve at Courbevoie-sur-Seine, between wars — or shows as he called them. His wife was reputed to go home with tears in her eyes everytime a war or revolution started in some far-off place for fear that she would find a note pinned to her pillow announcing her husband's absence.

Born to a wealthy family, Sweeny had fought in the Spanish-American War at 16, was expelled twice from West Point (1901 for demerits, readmitted 1902 and kicked out finally in 1903) and then started an unparalleled career as a soldier of fortune in Latin America (Venezuela, Honduras and Mexico) before going to France near the start of World War I.

When it began, "Sweeny went from cafe to cafe, rounding up young Americans and trying to talk them into joining



Hilaire du Berrier with Don Jaime de Bourbon, third in line of succession to throne of Spain, on Paris street in 1931.

the Foreign Legion with him," said du Berrier. Among those who answered Sweeny's call to the Legion were the poets Allen Seeger and Joyce Kilmer.

Sweeny was wounded six times while serving with the Legion, was the first American commissioned in the Legion and finished as a colonel before he took a one-grade bust when he transferred to America's 80th Division in 1918.

It was through Sweeny that du Berrier came to know Major Granville Pollack, an American pilot from the Lafayette Escadrille; Clifford Harmon, founder of the International League of Aviators for whom the Harmon trophy is named; and Gen. Maxime Weygand, Marshal Foch's Chief of Staff during World War I.

Weygand, feared by politicians and generals alike for his close relationship to Foch, was selected to lead a French military mission sent to assist Poland's Marshal Josef Pilsudski, then being driven back by the Bolsheviks. With

Sweeny commanding a division, Weygand contributed the strategy that reversed the course of the war and defeated the Bolsheviks.

Granville Pollack was the air commander for a squadron that Sweeny organized in 1923 to go to Morocco and fight for the sultan against Abd el Krim. Doc Sparks, a dentist who preferred flying as a soldier of fortune, also participated in that show.

Also in the group of SOFers around Sweeny were Jimmy Bach, an American veteran of the Lafayette Escadrille, who was credited with being the first American to shoot down a German plane during the war; Prince Aage of Denmark, who relinquished his right of succession to the throne to wear the white kepi of the French Foreign Legion; and Vincent Minor Schmidt. Schmidt, an American, was an artilleryman in WWI at 16, piloted Marshall Field III on big-game hunts in Africa during the 1920s and flew for a Chinese warlord in 1931.

Du Berrier and Olaf de Wet — from a long line of high-ranking British officers, de Wet was a former RAF lieutenant invalidated out after a crash — sat in cafes in Paris, absorbing the code of ethics for a soldier of fortune from Sweeny and his friends.

"Soldiers of fortune of the Sweeny, Pollack and Schmidt breed had a code that covered everything from mode of dress to dying, and their standards were rigid," said du Berrier. "There could be

no greater insult to a soldier of fortune than to call him a mercenary. Mercenaries were human sheep rented out to fight, with no say as to whom they would fight or why.

"The soldier of fortune is a man who chooses the warrior's life for its own sake and, by the code of Sweeny, Pollock and Schmidt, faces the fact that if there were a chance of winning, the side for which he is fighting would not need him, and in any case, is unlikely to pay him in full."

Du Berrier's mother had died in 1935 and left him a small inheritance. Enamored of the life of a soldier of fortune, he decided he would use the money to finance a trip to Ethiopia, where war with Italy loomed on the horizon.

Benito Mussolini was looking around Africa for a colony and a place to exhibit the military machine he had built in Italy. Ethiopia, with its wealth of natural resources and strategic location, was his choice; it would also personally satisfy him. When Mussolini was a child, his father had fought in a campaign against the Ethiopians. Captured, he was castrated — a routine fate for all captured Italians in the first Ethiopian war as well as the one about to begin.

In the fall of 1935, du Berrier set sail for Djibouti, a French-controlled port on the Red Sea that had a rail link with Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia — and at the moment a hotbed of rumor and the destination of choice for as wild a collection of spies, adventurers, foreign correspondents and charlatans as one could imagine. "They were the merriest bunch of fighting, spitting, swearing, drinking, bottle-smashing cutthroats a man could meet," said du Berrier.

Haile Selassie, "King of the Kings of Ethiopia, Lion of Judah and the Elect of God," who traced his ancestry all the way back to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, was desperate for help.

Hilaire du Berrier, drawn by Earl Kirkham in 1932.



Before leaving France, du Berrier had contacted Selassie's envoy in Paris and, upon arrival, went straight to the air minister, Thadessa Mechencha. Du Berrier, soon joined by Schmidt and de Wet, was there to form a squadron using soldiers of fortune as pilots. The problem was a lack of planes as well as spare parts for the few planes the Ethiopians did have. The nations of Europe and America, frightened of Mussolini's military might, refused to ship either planes or parts.

War came on 3 October 1935 when Mussolini sent columns marching toward Addis Ababa from Eritrea and Somalia. Du Berrier and his friends joined the crowd in front of Selassie's Grand Guebi Palace where the declaration of war and the Ethiopian draft notice were read — punctuated by periodic rolls from a huge drum.

Selassie's draft notice to his people was all encompassing and obviously composed to prevent any dodging whatsoever. Every man and woman, young or old, was directed to report immediately to the nearest military barracks, bringing with them whatever weapons they owned, whether rifle,

His Majesty Haile Selassie reviews saber-swinging tribesmen from his balcony on the Grand Guebi Palace in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1936. Members of Emperor's family are still alive, forgotten by the world and living under atrocious conditions in the dungeons beneath this old palace with its corrugated-tin roof.

saber, spear, hoe or fists. Persons missing arms or legs were not exempted, nor were pregnant women unless birth was imminent, in which case they were exempted until 30 days after the birth.

Columns of barefoot but healthy men were sent forth to die in human-wave attacks against the Italian army, which was equipped with machine guns, tanks and poison gas. Old men and young boys were sent out with ancient rifles to work on the edges of the Ethiopian army columns as snipers. Women cooked and carried.

In what was probably one of the most barbaric campaigns in this century, the Italians smashed all of Selassie's columns and moved relentlessly toward Addis Ababa. The imminent arrival of the Italians caused defections from the ranks of adventurers who had hastened to the capital.

Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, later to gain some fame as the drug- and gun-running "Black Eagle of Harlem" in Latin America, had turned up in Ethiopia late in the year, but decided he would be better off with the Italians. Although Julian later claimed to have actually flown against the Italians, du Berrier says that was not true.

Benny Arnold, an American journalist, left, as did Count Carl Gustaf von Rosen, soldier of fortune, explorer and humanitarian from Sweden.

Schmidt and de Wet also left. A half-Russian, half-Ethiopian colonel named Babicheff had accused Schmidt, who was American, of being a German/Italian spy. De Wet, "a wonderful person sober, a wild man when drinking," according to du Berrier, got drunk and challenged a Belgian officer to a duel. The Belgian chose sabers. The British ambassador arrested de Wet the night before the scheduled duel and sent him to Djibouti under armed escort.



Barefoot Ethiopian soldiers being trained in Addis Ababa before they were sent to die in human-wave attacks against Italian 4th, 5th, 9th and 10th Companies of Troop R, Erythrian command, advancing from north.

John Robinson, an American Negro from Chicago, nicknamed "The Brown Condor," was one of the few adventurers who stayed, and he stayed forever. Robinson had gotten into a quarrel with Count von Rosen and for slugging him Selassie had Robinson locked up for 30 days.

When he got out Robinson flew a Breguet 19 in combat against the Italians. Coming in for a landing at Addis Ababa, Robinson misjudged his approach speed, the gear folded up and he died in the crash.

"He was a fine fellow and an excellent pilot," said du Berrier. "It was just his time."

By April 1936, one of the few soldiers of fortune still left in Addis Ababa was du Berrier.

Over endless Turkish coffees in cafes, du Berrier listened to the tales of Wehib Pasha, governor of Mecca during World War I, about Enver Bey, Turkey's war minister and leader of the Young Turks. When Turkey lost its war, Enver Bey

There probably is no stranger nor more mysterious a land in which a soldier of fortune could begin his career than in Ethiopia — in 1935 or now.

Located just above the equator, Ethiopia consists of 472,000 square miles of diverse terrain — plateau, desert, jungle and snowcapped mountains — ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 feet in elevation.

It has an even more diverse past.

Very early in the history of civilization, Ethiopia had strong ties with Egypt and at times the two nations were ruled by the same Pharaoh. Ethiopians appear among the allies of Troy in Homer's *Iliad* as Aethiopians, and Ethiopia, or at least part of it, appears as Sheba in the Bible.

Many scholars, and the Menelik dynasty of Ethiopia which ruled until 1974, were convinced that the biblical Queen of Sheba, who visited Israel's King Solomon, came from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian version of the story is that the queen was seduced by Solomon and that a son, Menelik, came from the union. One presumes that Solomon was trying to assure his access to the gold mines that are known to us as King Solomon's Mines.

That is why Haile Selassie took the title "King of the Kings of Ethiopia, Lion of Judah and the Elect of God," and claimed descent from King Solomon when he assumed the throne in 1930.

Either during the time of Menelik or later during the Babylonian captivity, a large number of Jews moved into Ethiopia. When European

EXOTIC ETHIOPIA

travelers started moving into what was then called Abyssinia in the 15th century, they found a thriving Jewish tribe called Falasha, which had never heard of the Talmud.

It is also possible that Ophir, mentioned in the Bible, was an area within Ethiopia, or at least an area of the Saudi Arabian peninsula that was Ethiopian-controlled. Ophir was the land from which the Three Wise Men came.

Christianity reached Ethiopia early (330 A.D.); in fact, the Ethiopian Coptic Church is the oldest surviving Christian sect in existence.

The Moslems came in the 7th century; the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century. The Portuguese were expelled in 1633 and the next European to reach Ethiopia was James Bruce of Scotland. Bruce, in search of the source of the Blue Nile, headed into Ethiopia in 1769 from the port of Massawa, in what is today Eritrea.

He emerged from Ethiopia in 1773. During his stay, he saw some strange and wonderful sights, and found the source of the Blue Nile. At one point, he was also forced to serve as a soldier of fortune, leading 70,000 troops, according to his account, in one battle to get cooperation from an Ethiopian king.

Another Bruce story would raise eyebrows even today. Near Adowa (now called Aduwa) Bruce reported:

"I overtook on the way three travel-

ers, who seemed to be soldiers, driving a cow before them. They halted at a brook, threw down the beast and one of them cut a pretty large dollop of flesh from its buttocks, after which they drove the cow gently on."

The 18th-century LRRP-ration story and other incredible tales led to Bruce's public ridicule by his peers. But when his book was published in 1790, the exotic tales made it a great success with the public.

Thirty years after Bruce's death in 1794, another explorer went into Ethiopia with the intention of disproving Bruce's account. Much to his chagrin, not only did he substantiate all of Bruce's tales but he even met Ethiopians who remembered Bruce.

Ethiopia's legacy has not been restricted to exotic tales of wanderers and soldiers of fortune. From former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (whose name before he became emperor was Ras Tafari) has come a Jamaican cult, the Rastafarians, who worship Selassie as a god, use marijuana in its ceremonies — and gave us reggae music.

Ethiopia has also given us coffee, both the word and the beverage. The Arabs probably discovered coffee, which they called *qahwah*, but the Turks called it *kahwah* after the village of Kaffa in southwestern Ethiopia where the Arabs discovered it.

An exotic drink from an exotic and historic land where, as Hilaire du Berrier said, "The difference between the possible and the impossible is very thin." by Jim Graves

had joined the White Russians and carved out an empire of his own as Prince of Bokhara, north of what today is Afghanistan. Eventually betrayed, he was killed at Aksu Kuyu in 1922 by a Russian agent.

Some minor tribal chieftains informed du Berrier that the governor of Gojam, in the extreme northwest of the country on the Anglo-Egyptian-Sudan border, had fled toward Egypt. A column of Ethiopian troops led by two Swedish soldiers of fortune and hauling two French 75mm cannon were on the road from Gojam to Addis Ababa to aid Selassie. Du Berrier reasoned they did not know that Selassie had fled Ethiopia for Palestine on 1 May en route to England.

The Italians coming south from Eritrea were bypassing many provinces because they were rushing to beat the *bouzou zinab*, the rains which would immobilize Ethiopia between May and September.

Du Berrier decided to try to sell some minor chieftains on the idea of meeting the approaching column, turning it around and marching it back to Gojam. He would be the front man — "His Apostolic Majesty, by the grace of God and the will of the People, King of Gojam" — they would be the powers behind the throne. His logic for his enthronement and their subordinate placement was that with a white man as king, they might get a better response from the League of Nations, which had refused to help Selassie.

"Crazy? Certainly it sounds crazy, but at that time and place the line between the possible and the impossible was very thin," said du Berrier. "Badoglio (the Italian general) could not get there before September and, by that time, anything might happen. The League of Nations might really do something effective. Mussolini might collapse. And, if worse came to worst, we could retreat through the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as former rulers of Gojam and leaders of the last armed resistance."

Just a few days before the end, du Berrier, in a Model T Ford he had rented from the American minister, went out to the town where he was to meet with some minor chieftains in on the Gojam plot. He found the town abandoned. Not one to let an opportunity like that slip by — and since he knew the Italians would do it if he didn't — du Berrier stripped the town of its treasures.

"Particularly I looted the Coptic church, because of the silver crosses, the incense burners, the robes the priests wore and the carved masks they carried in procession," said du Berrier. "And those holy books written on sheepskin in the language of the Queen of Sheba."

Primitive paintings, gold and silver cups, dishes and tableware — all left by



Old men, deemed too old to merit any other name than *shimagelli* (old man), were given ancient rifles and trained to fight as snipers against Italians in the war of 1935-36. They didn't survive against Italian light tanks, machine guns and poison gas.

the terrified Ethiopians — were loaded into the Model T. On the way back to Addis Ababa, du Berrier flagged down the train to Djibouti and sent the treasure to himself, care of the Hotel de Europe there. "I knew they never bothered with customs in those days and that it would be waiting for me at the hotel if I could get out."

On 5 May du Berrier set out on the road to Gojam. Addis Ababa by then was full of corpses and shops and homes smashed by the hands of drunken looters.

These black-shirted Italians on motorcycles, in advance guard of the column moving on Addis Ababa, were the ones who captured du Berrier 55 miles out of the city on 5 May 1936. Both Italians and du Berrier were racing to beat the *bouzou zinab*, the great rains from May to September that turn most of Ethiopia into a morass of mud: Italians to capture Addis Ababa, du Berrier to take over as ruler of Gojam Province.



"We didn't know it, but the Ethiopians in the column had dumped the 75s into a ravine and taken to the hills," said du Berrier. "The Swedish officers had left the country. Fifty-five miles outside of Addis Ababa, we came over a hill and I found myself facing three Black Shirts on motorcycles. Behind them were 1,200 automobiles, most of them American, loaded with Italian officers."

"That's as far as I got toward Gojam."

"The first Italian that spoke to me questioned me in French. He asked me if I were French and I replied, 'No, I'm American.' He immediately switched to English and told me his mother was a Schuster from Boston. Scotti was a colonel then but I heard that he later became a general."

"A very good-looking Italian came up then, shook my hand and said, 'I know you. I've seen you in Monte Carlo. I'm Prince San Selice. You were the man that was going to form a squadron."

"We talked for a while before the column started moving again. He thought it (my capture) was a great joke on me."

At the edge of Addis Ababa, the column, with du Berrier riding in the second car as a privileged prisoner, halted so that Italian movie crews could move up and film the triumphant entry. When the Italian column reached the Grand Guebi Palace, "the Italians went crazy, throwing their hats in the air. They had won the war. They made the column go through the same routine three times."

While the Italians were perfecting their delirious act, du Berrier took advantage of the confusion and strolled away. He went first to the American ministry, only to learn the American minister had fled to the British embassy. Du Berrier next went there but, receiving no offers of help, finally approached the French embassy. On 9 May he was smuggled out on a train carrying French troops to Djibouti.

In Djibouti, also called "the territory of the Afars and Issas" after the two

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DU BERRIER

Continued from page 33

main Arab tribes there, du Berrier collected his treasures at the hotel and then spitefully shipped half of them to the wife of a professor he had hated from his art school days in Chicago. (The husband had not appreciated his wife's friendship for du Berrier and had predicted a life of poverty for the art student.)

Then du Berrier began looking for familiar faces in Djibouti. A friend of both Said Abdullah Mohammed, a descendant of the prophet, and Lij Andargue Messai, the Ethiopian counsel in Djibouti, du Berrier was soon in the thick of more plots.

Said Abdullah Mohammed and du Berrier schemed for weeks to start a guerrilla resistance in the south of Ethiopia, but when the plan came to naught, he accepted a job that Messai found for him with the Imam of Yeman.

The French had given the Imam a Breguet 19 and Messai had arranged for du Berrier to be hired as pilot. But shortly thereafter the Imam was assassinated by his Vizier-el-Harbaya (minister of war) Syro Abdulla, ending du Berrier's brief employment as a pilot.

Du Berrier left Djibouti as a deck passenger on a German ship heading up to Port Said. On board the ship was a Hungarian baroness, Lydia Maria Von Aztel. A friendship developed and in Port Said they switched to a Greek ship that took them to Greece and Istanbul where they switched to a Romanian ship to Constantia. They then went overland to Cluj, Romania.

"Drinking hot chocolate on the terrace of the New York Hotel in Cluj, capital of the old Dacia of the Romans, on a beautiful July morning with the Baroness Lydia and Mr. Romul Vuia, curator of the Museum of Ethnography, I read a newspaper that had just arrived from London," said du Berrier. "From the paper we learned that there was a revolt in Spain, led by Gen. Jose Saconell Sanjurjo, the monarchist.

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"I gave the suitcases of plunder I had carried from Ethiopia to Mr. Vuia, on loan, to form a collection for his museum under my name and left for Spain." Du Berrier saw the war in Spain as a chance to restore Alfonso XIII to the throne and his friend Don Jaime de Bourbon, Alfonso's son, to the line of succession. It was another golden opportunity for a soldier of fortune. ✕

(To be continued.)

THE CAST

Benny Arnould, American correspondent in Ethiopia, 1935-36. Committed suicide in Wolf City, Texas, 1962.

Baroness Lydia Maria Von Axtel, Hungarian. Lived in Cluj, Romania. In 1942 Baroness Axtel was arrested and imprisoned by the Romanians for supporting a Transylvanian separatist movement. She died in prison.

Jimmy Bach, American pilot in the Lafayette Escadrille. Crashed behind German lines after inserting a spy. Arrested and tried for espionage, he avoided a death sentence because he had enough money to import a brilliant German lawyer from Berlin. For the rest of the war, Bach was Herr President of the American Prisoners' Club, of which, for a long time, he was the only member. Bach lived in Paris until the late '30s, selling Studebaker automobiles and taking Americans on tours of battlefields. Returned to America, fate unknown.

Marie Barnes, French mistress of Baron de Mumm, prior to WWI. Mumm, actually a German, had made a fortune prior to 1914 from visitors to France who ordered his champagne primarily because they could pronounce its name. When Mumm told Barnes he was going to marry an American heiress, she shot him five times, none fatal. He testified for her at her trial and she was released since it was a crime of passion. Mumm was imprisoned by the French during WWI and his fortune confiscated. Broke, he shot himself.

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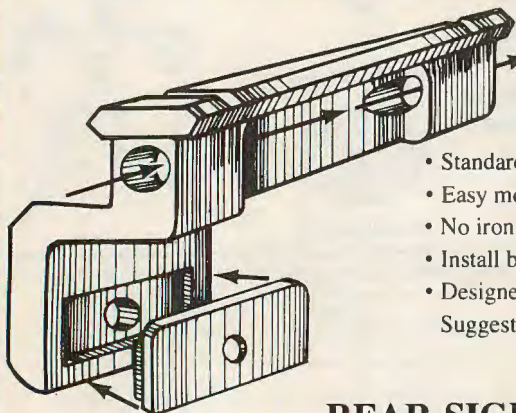
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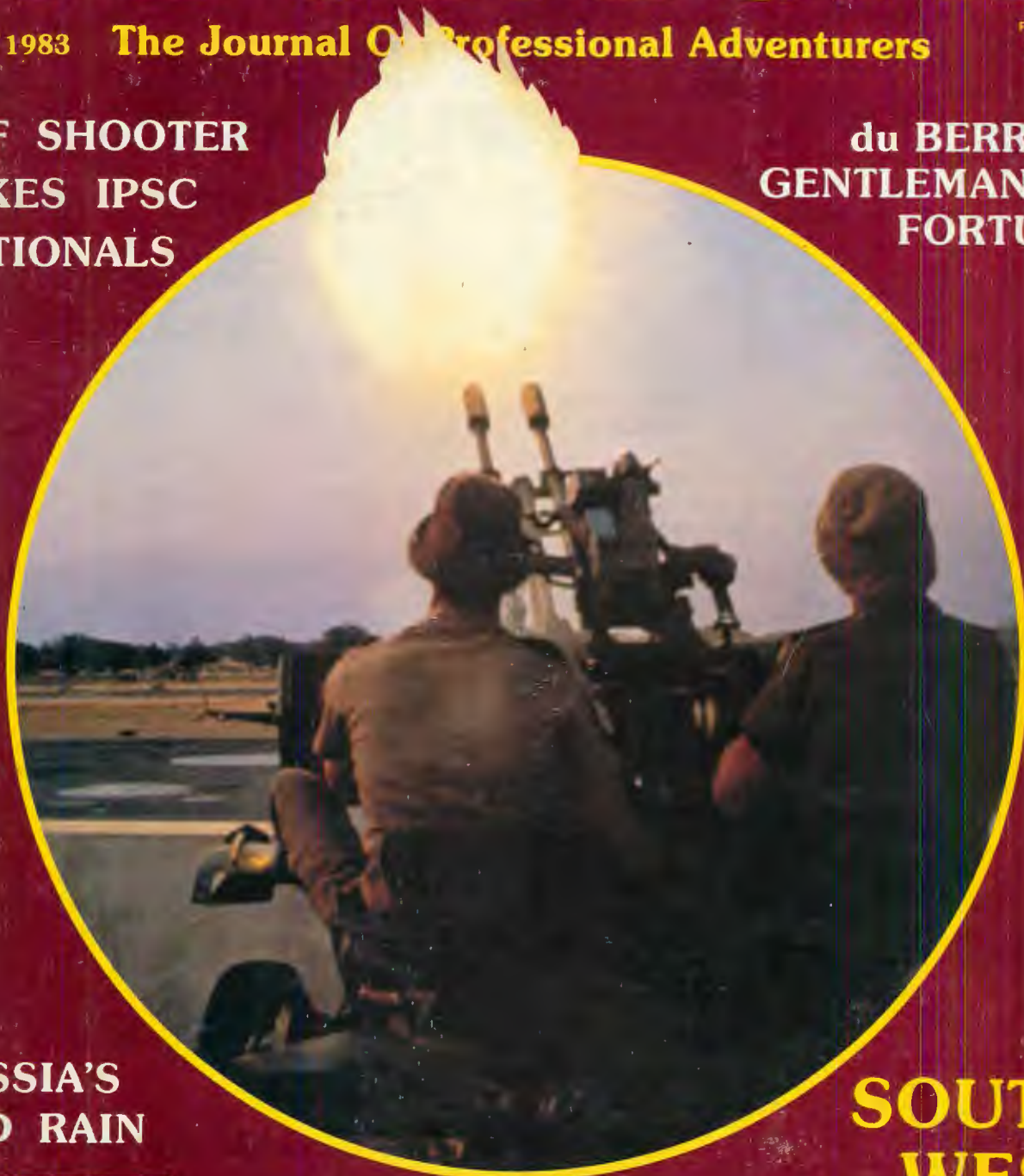
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**RUSSIA'S
RED RAIN**

**SOUTH
WEST
AFRICA UPDATE**



EDITOR'S NOTE

An open letter to the boys in the KGB and in Soviet Military Missions everywhere.

Dear Boris:

Just thought you would like to know that things are going quite well for *Soldier of Fortune* and all the gang in Boulder.

We received, from our friends in South Africa, the body armor one of your officers was wearing last year when the South Africans singed your tails in Angola during Operation Protea. Pete Kokalis's evaluation of it appears on page 41 of this issue. Talk to the boys in quality control, Boris; Pete says your armor wouldn't stop a souped-up BB.

In case you weren't aware of it, Pete, Bob Brown and Jim Coyne were up on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border recently to test-fire some of your latest weapons, including the AGS-17. Pete's story on your grenade-launching AGS-17 will appear next month; if you're buying SOF on the stands, you better hurry — it might sell out.

The Afghans sent a few souvenirs for me. I haven't had a chance to do much collecting since I turned in my expense account from Monte Carlo and Paris — RHIP in assignments here too.

Getting to the point — I know you're busy with problems in Poland, Afghanistan, El Salvador and the Horn of Africa — they sent me one of your belts, complete with the hammer-and-sickle belt buckle. The Russian the Afghans took it from in Kabul must have been in excellent shape — I had to let it out some. Our Afghan friends didn't have time to get his paybook so I can't tell you who he was, but if you write for details, maybe you can find out.

Jim Morris is back from El Salvador and Robert Caldwell is out of Guatemala. You guys need to take the troops out to the practice range more often.

Your boys in El Salvador whizzed a few over Jim's head and your troopies up in Guatemala couldn't hit the chopper Caldwell was in, even though it was making passes only 30 feet off the ground. According to them, your boys are not doing too well. Life in the jungle can get nasty, as well as deadly, when the "indige" take it seriously and do it right. Jim's and Robert's stories will probably run in March and April, maybe sooner, since we have a lot of other trips planned for your areas in the near future and scheduling is tough when you have so much excellent copy.

Got to admit though that your disinformation department is doing well over here. Despite all our efforts and the efforts of the *Wall Street Journal* and *Reader's Digest* — we're keeping better company these days — Americans don't know what you guys are up to in the area of chemical munitions. A recent *Wall Street Journal* survey showed that only 22 percent of the people in this country realize you guys have been gassing people since WWII and 57 percent didn't even realize our government had accused you of it. The real stunner was that 12 percent of the college-educated respondents thought Yellow Rain was a form of pollution. Maybe the article by Dave Isby on page 58 will enlighten a few more Americans.

Oh well, SOF will keep on chipping away.

Have to close and catch a plane. Don't bother to ask where.

Stay low, sucker,

Jim Graves

P.S. "Mekong" Jimmy Coyne appreciates the offer from your KGB guy in Bangkok to take him to Russia, so you could show him the truth; but he's been too busy in Afghanistan. We sent someone else instead; I'm sure you understand why he didn't make a courtesy call at your office in Dzerzhinsky Square.

EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Robert K. Brown

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Jim Graves

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John Metzger Bill Brooks

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FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

Jim Coyne

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Margaret McDonald

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Renee Gitchell

ART DIRECTOR

Craig Nunn

ART ASSISTANT

Anne Beer

TYPOGRAPHERS

Thomas E. Vivrett

Eileen Bernard

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Military Small Arms

Peter G. Kokalis

Small Arms

Ken Hackathorn

Jake Jatras

Africa

Al J. Venter

Aviation

Walt Darran

Dana Drenkowski

Sniping/Countersniping

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Law Enforcement

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SOF

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COVER: South African troops fire captured Russian 23mm ZSU 23-4 antiaircraft gun in forward base inside Angola. Since Operation Protea in 1981, the face of war in South West Africa has changed dramatically. Current probes into southern Angola by South Africans have been accelerated, leaving almost 1,700 SWAPO terrorists dead in the last 16 months. In this issue, SOF covers the ongoing war of attrition, where the Soviet-backed terrors are losing good soldiers and allies. See Al J. Venter's "Springbok Update," on page 46. Photo: Al J. Venter

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